DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 413 EA 029 650

TITLE	Our Students, Our Future: An Introduction to Education in Alberta, Kindergarten to Grade 12.
INSTITUTION	Alberta Dept. of Education, Edmonton.
ISBN	ISBN-0-7785-0297-X
PUB DATE	1998-10-00
NOTE	27p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Alberta Education, Communications, 11160 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 0L2, Canada; Web site: http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Admission (School); Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Program Descriptions; Role of Education; School Choice
IDENTIFIERS	Alberta

ABSTRACT

This publication explains the ABCs of Alberta's school system. The text details Alberta's goals, various levels of responsibility, funding, public and private schooling, academic core and optional programs, home education, testing, high-school diploma requirements, programs for students with special needs, and programs for students from other countries. The guide is intended for parents, providing them with the information they may need to make the best educational choices for their children. The text is divided into nine topics: Alberta's commitment to universal public education; the roles and responsibilities of partners in education; education property taxes; opportunities for choice in education, such as private schools, charter schools, Francophone schools, alternative programs, home education, blended programs, and virtual programs; enrollment requirements for out-of-province students; a solid foundation in school programs, including basic K-12 programs, language and art programs, and students with special needs programs; strategies to prepare students for the future; expectations in reaching high standards; and how to ensure quality teaching. (RJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 427 413

Our Students, our future.

An Introduction to Education in Alberta

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
C. Andrews
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

Kindergarten to Grade 12

EA 029 650

First Things First for Our Children

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

I: Alberta's Commitment

Universal Public Education 3

Key Principles 4

II: Partners in Education

Roles and Responsibilities 4

III: Fair and Equitable Funding

Education Property Taxes 8

IV: Opportunities for Choice in Education

Public Education System 9

- Public Schools
- Separate Schools
- Francophone Schools
- Charter Schools
- Alternative Programs
- Home Education
- Blended Programs
- Virtual Programs

Private Schools 11

- Special Education Private Schools 11

Board Responsibilities and Parent Choice 12

- Residency 12
- School Bussing 13

V: Out-of-Province Students

Transfers from Other Provinces and Countries 13

International Students 13

VI: A Solid Foundation

Provincial Co-operation

Basic Programs

- Kindergarten and Special Needs Pre-School Programs 14
- Grades 1 to 6 15
- Grades 7 to 9 15
- Grades 10 to 12 15

The School Year 16
Other Programs
Languages 16
Fine Arts 17
English as a Second Language 17
Students with Special Needs 18
Board Responsibility
Student Placement
Assessments
Individualized Program Plans

VII: Preparing Students for the Future
Technology Learning 18
Career and Technology Studies (CTS) 19
Off-campus Education 20
Outreach Programs 20

VIII: Meeting High Standards
High School Graduation Requirements 20
Diploma Exams 21
Provincial Achievement Tests 22
Report Cards 22
National and International Achievement Testing 23

IX: Quality Teaching
Standards 23
Requirements 23

FOREWORD

This publication explains the ABCs of the school system in Alberta: its goals, various levels of responsibility, funding, public and private schooling, academic core and optional programs, home education, testing, high school diploma requirements, programs for students with special needs, and programs for students from other countries. It also covers such basics as school entrance age, the length of the school year, holidays, school fees and bussing.

This guide is useful for parents, providing them with the information they may need to make the best educational choices for their children. Alberta today offers more schooling options than ever before. The opportunity for choice reflects the Alberta government's commitment to quality education — the solid foundation every child needs to learn, grow and succeed.

Our Students, our future is intended to serve as a general introduction to education in Alberta from kindergarten to grade 12. More detailed information on specific areas or programs can be obtained from other, complementary resources published by Alberta Education.

Quick Facts: Alberta Profile

The province's population of three million is:

- one of the youngest in the world; one half of its people are under 30 years of age;
- made up of many ethnic groups, adding a rich, multicultural diversity to the province;
- well-educated with more people per capita having university degrees than any other province in Canada.

I. ALBERTA'S COMMITMENT

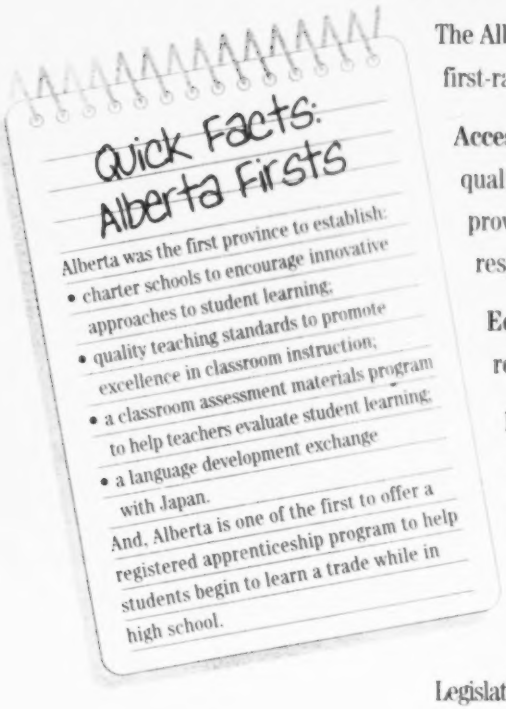
Universal Public Education

Under the Canadian Constitution, each province and territory has exclusive jurisdiction over education. Each system reflects the diversity of the region's unique historical and cultural heritage.

Public education is provided free of charge to all Canadian citizens and permanent residents under 20 years of age until the end of secondary school. In Alberta, students are legally required to attend school from ages 6 to 16.

Our public education system includes public, separate, francophone and charter schools, as well as alternative programs and virtual programs offered by school boards, and home education. Public and separate school boards operate the basic education system in the province — the universal system accessible to everyone. Separate school boards administer Roman Catholic and Protestant separate schools. In Alberta, the minority Roman Catholic or Protestant faith has the right to form its own school system.

Key Principles


Quick Facts:
Alberta Firsts
Alberta was the first province to establish:
• charter schools to encourage innovative approaches to student learning;
• quality teaching standards to promote excellence in classroom instruction;
• a classroom assessment materials program to help teachers evaluate student learning;
• a language development exchange with Japan.
And, Alberta is one of the first to offer a registered apprenticeship program to help students begin to learn a trade while in high school.

The Alberta *School Act* contains five fundamental principles that define a first-rate education for every child in this province:

Access to quality education – Every student has the right of access to a quality basic education that is consistent with the student's abilities and provides the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be a self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing member of society.

Equity – All students have equal access to a quality basic education regardless of where in the province they live.

Flexibility and choice – Parents and students have opportunities to choose schools and programs in the public education system, within standards and policies set by the provincial government. School boards are expected to meet the educational needs of the students and communities they serve.

Responsiveness – The student is the focus of the education system. Legislation, policies and practices support communities in delivering school programs and services that are responsive to the unique needs of each child.

Accountability – All those involved in making decisions about educational matters — from the Minister to school boards and staff, parents and students — must be accountable for their decisions.

The *School Act* establishes the relationship of the Minister of Education to students, parents and school boards. It enables the Minister to prescribe courses and programs of study, instructional time and materials, and educational standards such as high school graduation requirements.

The *School Act* also defines the roles and responsibilities of school authorities, superintendents, principals and teachers, as well as a code of conduct for students.

II. PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

Roles and Responsibilities

Everyone – from parents to students, the community, business, government, teachers and administrators — has an important and co-operative role to play in public education. The Government of Alberta encourages a broad range of community consultation and involvement with the school system to enhance learning opportunities for children and to meet their education needs.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Students

- ✔ Assume responsibilities and make choices about their learning and career paths, according to their level of maturity.
- ✔ Complete their homework and study assignments diligently.
- ✔ Follow the code of conduct of their school and the *School Act*.
- ✔ Contribute to a safe and caring climate in their school.
- ✔ Contribute to the accomplishments of their school.

Teachers

- ✔ Provide students with the instruction they need to achieve learning expectations for each grade and subject as outlined in the Alberta Programs of Study.
- ✔ Foster and encourage learning.
- ✔ Stay up-to-date on curriculum and teaching methods.
- ✔ Evaluate students and periodically report the results to students, parents and the board.
- ✔ Maintain discipline among students at school and during school-approved activities.
- ✔ Contribute to school decision making.
- ✔ May be involved in school extra-curricular activities, and with committees for curriculum, student evaluation, field testing and evaluating new courses, instructional materials and assessment materials.

Note: See section on Quality Teaching on page 23.

Principals

- ✔ Provide instructional leadership, and administer the school within the policies of the school board and with the advice of the school council.
- ✔ Maintain order and discipline in the school, on the school grounds and during board-sponsored or approved activities.
- ✔ Promote co-operation between the school and the community it serves.
- ✔ Supervise the evaluation and advancement of students.
- ✔ Evaluate teachers employed in the school.
- ✔ Ensure teaching assignments are the best possible match with teacher skills.

Quick Facts: Alberta Education

	1967	1997
Students	385,972*	547,940**
Teachers	19,579	26,258
Schools	1,388	2,015
School boards	229	62
Education Spending *(in millions)*	$219	$3,129

* Funded 1–12 students (public system)
** Funded ECS–12 students (public and private)

Parents

- Foster a positive attitude towards learning in their children.
- Encourage their children to achieve their potential at school and to be actively involved in their school.
- Make decisions regarding their children's education, including choice of schools and programs.
- Make sure their children come to school ready to learn.
- Familiarize themselves with learning expectations for the different subjects in their children's grade level, and with school policies and regulations.
- Maintain an ongoing communication with teachers and the school.
- Check their children's school work to make sure assignments are completed properly, and help them develop good study habits.
- Initiate learning activities at home.
- May volunteer time to their children's school(s); participate in field trips and other extracurricular activities, act as a classroom resource or serve on the school council.

School Councils

- Allow parents and the community to actively participate in their local school.
- May function differently from one school and jurisdiction to another. Involvement can range from minimal to active, collaborative decision making on school policies and goals.
- May advise the principal and school board on: school policies (such as discipline and fundraising), program development (such as extra-curricular activities, new programs and resources), budgets, use of achievement tests to improve student learning, and methods of reporting student progress (for example, report cards).
- Each council develops and defines its role.

The *School Act* requires each school to have a school council.

Community/Business

- Work with schools to create a rich learning environment, responsive to community needs.
- Contribute volunteer time and resources to school programs, extra-curricular activities and fundraising initiatives.

School-based Decision Making

The Government of Alberta promotes school-based decision making to ensure local needs and priorities are met. Since 1994, schools have been given considerable flexibility on decision making. Schools may advise their local board or make their own policy and budget decisions. This varies from board to board.

- Serve on school councils.
- Create true partnerships in the development of specific programs, such as work experience and study programs.

School Boards

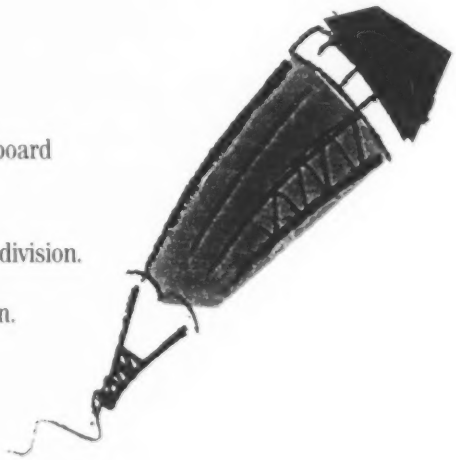
- Are made up of trustees elected during municipal elections for three-year terms. Trustees are collectively responsible for policy decisions made by the school board.
- Ensure resident students are provided with an education program consistent with the *School Act* and provincial regulations.
- Implement the Alberta Programs of Study set by the Minister of Education.
- Provide optional programs in response to community and student interests and needs.
- Supervise schools within their jurisdiction.
- Approve the hiring, promotion and dismissal of teachers and administrators.
- Allocate school budgets fairly and equitably within provincial government guidelines.
- Arrange transportation for students according to provincial regulations.
- Set district policies consistent with provincial policies in areas such as the school year.
- Provide for the professional development of staff.

Superintendents

- Serve as the chief executive officer and chief education officer of the board and of the school jurisdiction.
- Provide leadership in all matters relating to education in the district or division.
- Implement education policies established by the Minister of Education.
- Ensure responsible fiscal management in keeping with legislation and regulations.
- Execute school board decisions.
- Hired by local boards, subject to the Minister of Education's approval, for a term of up to five years, which can be renewed.

Appeals

If parents have concerns about a problem their child may be having at school or a decision made regarding their child's education, they should contact the teacher first and the principal second. If an agreement can not be reached at the school level, parents may appeal to their superintendent and then their school board. Every board has an appeal policy. As a last resort, parents may ask the Minister of Education to review certain board decisions such as special education student placement or an expulsion. However, not all board decisions are open to review.



Alberta Education

- ✔ Carries out the provincial government's constitutional responsibility for education under the direction of the Minister of Education.
- ✔ Establishes legislation, policies and long-range plans for education programs.
- ✔ Sets curriculum and provincial standards for student achievement and teacher certification.
- ✔ Ensures school jurisdictions get an equitable share of the education budget.
- ✔ Assesses and reports to the government and public on student achievement, costs and other important matters related to education.
- ✔ Evaluates results achieved by schools and school boards across Alberta.
- ✔ Helps schools and school boards fulfil their obligations, including provincial policies and expectations.

III. FAIR AND EQUITABLE FUNDING

The Government of Alberta distributes education dollars as fairly as possible to provide all students with a quality education wherever they live in the province. Public education is funded through provincial general revenues and education property taxes.

Funding is allocated to school boards in three blocks: instruction, support and capital. The majority of funding is distributed on a per student basis. Every school board receives the same amount per student for basic instruction. Additional funds are provided, depending on student needs (programming for students with severe disabilities, English as a Second Language and so on), sparse student population (in rural areas), transportation needs and other non-instructional costs.

Instructional funding to local boards for grades 1 to 9 is based on school enrolments as of September 30. Funding for students in senior high courses is calculated on a per credit basis according to the number of courses completed.

School Fees

Under the *School Act*, school boards may not charge Alberta students tuition fees. They may set fees for such things as transportation; textbook, locker and musical instrument rentals; lunchroom supervision; art supplies; field trips; yearbooks and class pictures. Parents are often required to provide school supplies needed by their children, such as notebooks, pens and pencils. Band and sports uniforms are also the responsibility of parents.

Education Property Taxes

Education property taxes support public and separate school students in grades 1 to 12. They are mostly used for instruction, including teacher salaries,

textbooks and other classroom resources. Education property taxes are not used to fund capital expenditures such as school construction or renovations, private schools, teachers' pensions or Department of Education operations.

All residential and non-residential property owners pay education property taxes whether or not they have children in school. Anyone who rents or leases property also pays property taxes indirectly through his or her monthly rent or lease payments.

Roman Catholic property owners who live in an area with a Catholic separate school board must direct their taxes to that board. Protestant property owners who live in St. Albert where there is a Protestant separate school board must direct their taxes to that board. (See section on Residency.) For more information on declaring or changing school board support, contact the local municipal office.

IV. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHOICE IN EDUCATION

Parents have a wide range of options to choose from within the public education system: public schools, separate schools, francophone schools, charter schools — as well as alternative programs and virtual programs offered by school boards — and home education. They may also choose to send their children to private schools. The Alberta government supports choice in education to ensure student and community needs are met.

Public Education System

Public Schools

Public schools provide basic, universal education. They offer the Alberta Programs of Study as well as optional programs and courses that may vary from one school and school jurisdiction to another.

Separate Schools

Separate schools can be either Roman Catholic or Protestant. In Alberta, the majority of separate schools are Roman Catholic. The first responsibility of separate boards is to provide a basic education for Roman Catholic or Protestant students within their jurisdiction. Roman Catholic or Protestant students do not have to attend separate schools within their jurisdiction. However, Roman Catholic property owners who live in an area with a Roman Catholic separate school system must designate their education property taxes to that system (see section on Education Property Taxes). Separate schools are funded on the same basis as public schools.

Any student may enrol in a separate school if there is sufficient space and resources. Non-Catholic or non-Protestant parents may choose to send their child to a separate school because of the program it offers (for example, a bilingual program).

Francophone Schools

Under the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, parents whose first language is French have the constitutional right to have their child educated in French, where numbers warrant. They also have the right to govern these schools themselves. There are a number of francophone regional authorities operating schools in Alberta.

Charter Schools

Charter schools were established to encourage innovative approaches to improve student learning by offering unique or enhanced education programs, teaching methods or learning environments, not available in the regular system. These schools are established only when there is significant community support, and parents must be active partners in the school.

Charter schools follow the Alberta Programs of Study, and students are required to write provincial achievement tests and grade 12 diploma exams. They can not be affiliated with a religious faith or denomination except when the school is established by a separate school board. They may offer religious instruction as may any other public or separate school under the *School Act*. Charter schools are run on a non-profit basis and any student may enrol as long as space and resources are available.

Alternative Programs

School boards may establish alternative programs that emphasize a particular language, culture, religion or subject matter, or use a particular teaching philosophy. These are not special education programs or religious education programs offered by separate school boards.

There are many alternative school programs across the province, including the Nellie McClung Junior High for girls, Logos Christian School, Talmud Torah School, the Alberta High School for the Fine Arts, and the Mandarin Chinese bilingual program.

Home Education

Parents may choose to educate their children at home, entirely or in part, provided they meet the requirements of the *School Act* and the Home Education Regulation.

The provincial government gives boards and accredited private schools a per student grant for supervising home education students. Parents receive 50 per cent of this grant for the purchase of programs of study and instructional materials. Parents do not have to use the Alberta Programs of Study. They can choose the

curriculum, resources and teaching methods consistent with their beliefs, but they must ensure their children are receiving an education that meets provincial standards.

Blended Programs

Through blended programs, parents may educate their children at home for part of the day and send them to school for the rest of their instruction. They may decide to teach the subjects they feel most capable of handling while the rest are taught by the school (at least 50 per cent of the student's program in grades 1 to 9 and at least 20 per cent in grades 10 to 12 must be taught in school).

Virtual Programs

An education program may be delivered electronically to a student. Virtual programs must provide elementary and junior high students with 950 hours of instruction and senior high students with 1,000 hours. They can be delivered by Internet, fax or telephone conferencing.

Private Schools

Parents may choose to educate their children outside the public education system, and in doing so may be responsible for some or all of the costs. Private schools may charge tuition fees and other fees as required. Under current provincial legislation, money collected for education through property taxes must only be used to fund the public education system.

There are two kinds of private schools in the province: registered and accredited.

Registered private schools do not have to offer the Alberta Programs of Study or employ teachers with teaching certificates. Students can not earn high school credits toward an Alberta graduation diploma. These schools are monitored but not funded by Alberta Education.

Accredited private schools follow the Alberta Programs of Study and employ teachers with Alberta teaching certificates. Students write provincial achievement tests and diploma exams, and may earn high school diplomas. Accredited schools are monitored by Alberta Education and may receive some provincial general revenue funding for instruction if they are operated by a non-profit society or corporation. Private schools do not receive funding for transportation, administrative support, school operation or maintenance, or for school buildings. All accredited, non-profit private schools are eligible for the same level of funding as public schools for students identified as having severe disabilities.

Private schools set their own criteria for enrolment, often based on adherence to a particular religious faith or educational philosophy.

Special Education Private Schools

Parents of students identified as having special needs can choose to send their child to a designated special education private school. As of September 1999, these schools will receive funding equivalent to that provided to public schools for students with mild, moderate or severe disabilities.

Board Responsibilities and Parent Choice

Residency

Every student is the responsibility of a public or separate school board. Residency is based on geography and religion. Students are considered to be residents of the area in which their parent(s) or guardian(s) normally reside. A student can only claim one place of residency.

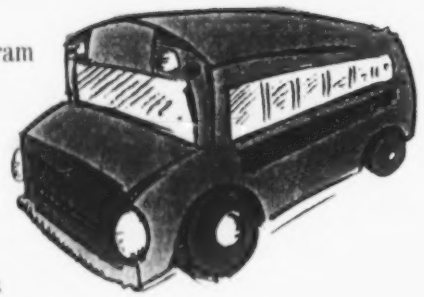
In an area where there is a Roman Catholic separate school board, children who have parents of the Roman Catholic faith are the responsibility of that school board. All other children are the responsibility of the local public school board. In cases of an interfaith marriage, when one of the parents is a Roman Catholic, the parents may choose either board and may make this choice on a yearly basis.

In St. Albert, where there is a Protestant separate school board, children who have parents of the Protestant faith are the responsibility of that board. All other children are the responsibility of the Greater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division, the public board. In an interfaith marriage, when one of the parents is Protestant, the parents may choose either board and may make this choice on a yearly basis.

Each local board is responsible for providing an education for each student residing within its jurisdiction. Boards may establish attendance boundaries for each school. Schools are required to enrol students residing within their boundaries, if the school program is determined to be suitable for the student by the board. Resident students are given priority over non-resident students if there are insufficient resources and facilities to accommodate both.

Parents do not have to send their children to a school in their attendance area or board jurisdiction. They may enrol their children in any school that has the resources and facilities to accommodate them, but they may have to pay for transportation or arrange their own. Parents may choose to send their children to special programs offered by schools outside their immediate jurisdiction, for example, bilingual or immersion programs. (See School Bussing.)

Parents who wish to educate their children at home may enrol them with a school board or accredited private school willing to supervise a full or blended home education program. The supervising board may also provide a virtual program in which a child receives instruction electronically.



School Bussing

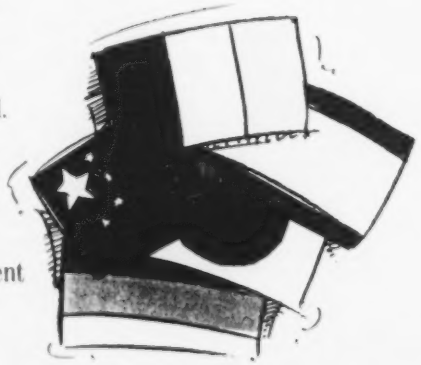
School boards are required to provide transportation for students who are enrolled in schools within their attendance area and who live more than 2.4 kilometres away. Many boards also provide bussing for special programs, such as language programs. Local boards may set fees to offset transportation costs.

V. OUT-OF-PROVINCE STUDENTS

Transfers from Other Provinces and Countries

Students who are entering the Alberta school system from outside the province (within Canada or from abroad) should submit an official statement of previous standing, such as a report card, to the school they plan to attend. They also should ask the school to arrange for the transfer of their previous school records and transcripts. Students coming into the province from outside Canada should bring copies of course outlines and content as well as information on how their last evaluation was determined, if possible.

The principal will place the student in the appropriate grade after carefully considering a number of factors including the student's records, test results and age. In senior high schools, the principal also determines which credits to recommend for students. Placement requirements can vary from school to school.



International Students

International students — students whose parents are citizens of and resident in another country — may enrol in Alberta schools. Currently, there are no provincial age guidelines for admission. Requirements may vary among local jurisdictions. International students pay tuition fees, which vary from one jurisdiction to another.

Parents may make their own arrangements to have their child study at an Alberta school or they may apply under the Alberta International Student Program. The program provides high school students from abroad an opportunity to study in

Alberta schools, develop their English and learn about Canada. High school students may be accepted for short-term programs of up to one semester, a full academic year or the entire high school program.

Under the program, students reside with a local family carefully screened for suitability. The family acts as the student's guardian. Alberta Education provides information about the program, monitors it and accepts applications. Acceptance into the program depends on local school board approval.

International Student Program costs include: tuition and incidental school fees, room and board, transportation, registration fee, health care insurance, visa application and a personal allowance (about $300 to $400 per month).

Prospective students must apply to a Canadian Immigration office for a student authorization (visa) in order to gain admission to Canada for the period of study.

VI. A SOLID FOUNDATION

Provincial Co-operation

Although the provinces and territories run their own educational systems, they are working together to develop common goals and programs in various subject areas.

Alberta took an important step in this direction when it began collaborating with Saskatchewan, Manitoba, British Columbia, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories on core subject programs. Since 1996, the four Western provinces and two territories have been developing common learning standards in Math, English Language Arts and French.

Basic Programs

The Alberta Programs of Study set provincial standards for all subjects and grades. School boards select instructional materials to help students achieve these standards. Programs of study have been established for elementary, junior high school and senior high school students. Students must take certain required courses and may choose optional courses, which vary from school to school. Alberta also has an approved program statement for kindergarten.

Grade and School Levels

The following grade and school levels are most common in the province. Some school boards have a middle school structure for grades 5 to 8.

Grades	Age*	Division
Kindergarten	5 years	
1 - 6	6 - 12 years	Elementary School
7 - 9	12 - 15 years	Junior High School
10 - 12	15 - 18 years	Senior High School

*Approximately

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Kindergarten and Special Needs Pre-School Programs

Early Childhood Services (ECS) includes kindergarten programs and pre-school programs for children with mild/moderate or severe disabilities. Parents may choose whether or not to send their children to ECS programs.

ECS prepares children for entry into grade 1. ECS programs may be provided through the public school system, private schools or private, non-profit ECS programs. They must meet government regulations and operate with certificated teachers. The provincial kindergarten program statement outlines what children should learn and be able to achieve in kindergarten.

ECS funding is available for children with mild/moderate or severe disabilities. Approved ECS program operators can provide information on funding and age requirements.

Entrance Age Requirements

The law requires all children who are six years old on September 1 to attend school. However, school boards may set their own age requirements for entering school. Many boards allow students to enter grade 1 if they are six years old by March 1 of the following year. Kindergarten entrance is one year less than the age set by the board to enter grade 1.

Grades 1 to 6

Required courses: Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Art and Music, Health and Physical Education.

Optional courses: Fifteen per cent of instructional time is set aside for optional subjects, such as French, Drama and Religious Instruction. Courses vary from school to school, according to local needs and priorities, and parental input.

Grades 7 to 9

Required courses: Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Physical Education, Health and Personal Life Skills.

Optional: Schools must offer two provincially authorized optional courses except where instruction in a language other than English is offered. Then only one provincially authorized optional course is required.

Grades 10 to 12

High schools offer many different choices:

- academic courses for university admission;
- general courses for students who want to go to a community college, an institute of technology or enter the work force immediately;
- career and technology studies courses to broaden learning experience;
- off-campus education courses for students who want specialized business, industrial or work experience training;
- fine arts courses for students who have a special interest in music, art or drama.

Programs vary by district and school. Parents and students should bear students' future career and study plans in mind when choosing courses. School counsellors can be helpful in this matter.

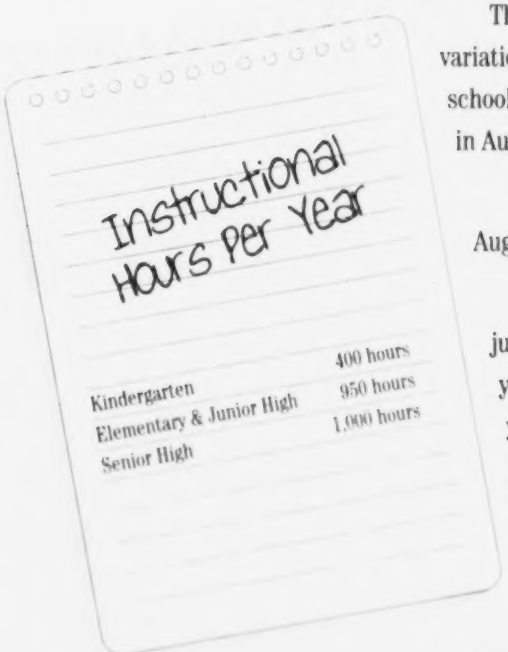
Post-secondary education (colleges, universities, technical institutions and trade schools) is the responsibility of the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development.

The School Year

The school year usually extends from September to June 30 with minor variations from system to system. Some schools are now providing year-round schooling and other alternative timetables, and others start their school year in August rather than September.

Most schools close down for two months of vacation in July and August, as well as two weeks of Christmas vacation and a spring break.

The number of instructional days may vary from 190 to 200 days. In junior high schools, the majority of courses are offered for the full school year. Optional courses may be rotated on a scheduled basis throughout the year. In senior high schools, courses may be offered for the full school year or on a semester basis (for half the year). Some high schools now offer a quarter-system calendar.



Other Programs

Other programs are available in addition to basic education programs. They vary from one jurisdiction and school to another, depending on local interest, and may consist of a course, sets of courses or an entire program of studies. They include: International and Native Languages, Fine Arts and English as a Second Language programs.

Languages

To receive their high school diploma, all students must successfully complete an English 30-level course.

Schools are not required to teach a second language. However, provincial curriculum is available for many second languages. Alberta Education supports French programs to encourage all students to learn Canada's other official language. Students are also encouraged to learn other languages.

Instruction is currently provided in 15 languages, other than French, in 40 school boards. Programs vary from district to district and school to school, depending on local interest.

There are three types of language programs:

- immersion in which the second language is used for 50 to 100 per cent of the school day at the elementary level (ECS to grade 6) and 40 to 80 per cent at the secondary level (grades 7 – 12);
- bilingual in which the language is used between 25 to 50 per cent of the time, and is used to teach other subjects besides Language Arts, such as Art, Music and Social Studies;
- second language programs which teach a particular language as a course.

Immersion programs are only offered in French. They are available in more than 160 Alberta schools. Public and separate school boards also have francophone programs, and most schools in the province offer French Second Language programs.

In addition to French, provincially developed language programs are offered in: Blackfoot, Cree, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Spanish and Ukrainian.

Many school boards have developed their own programs. Local language programs include: Arabic, Chinese, Chipewyan, German, Hebrew, Mandarin, Polish and Portuguese. Greek, Hungarian and Swedish are also available locally, but they are not always offered every year.

Many school boards provide bussing for children enrolled in language programs outside their residency area. Alberta Education will fund this transportation service if it is provided by a board. Boards have the authority to charge fees to cover these transportation costs.

Patriotic & Religious Instruction and Exercises

Public and separate school boards may require their schools to schedule religious and/or patriotic instruction and exercises. Parents may request that their child be exempt from these.

Fine Arts

In grades 1 through 6, students take compulsory courses in Art and Music, and learn dance as part of Physical Education. Many elementary schools also offer Drama as an option.

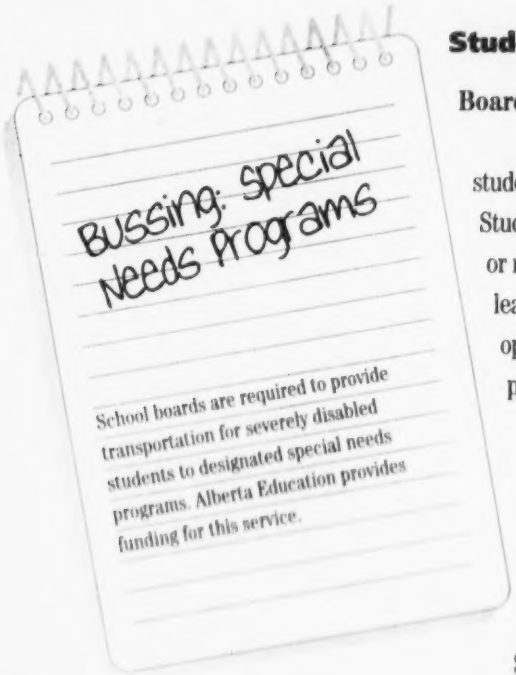
Students in most junior and senior high schools have access to optional Art, Music and Drama courses. Some schools run programs focused on Fine Arts.

English as a Second Language

English as Second Language (ESL) instruction is offered to both Canadian-born and foreign-born students by local boards in schools according to need. Some schools offer ESL assistance in both elementary and secondary grades.

ESL programs help students learn English more quickly and adjust to Canadian cultural values, customs and social expectations. Students spend the rest of the time in regular classes. Students may receive ESL instruction for up to three years.

17


Bussing: special needs programs
School boards are required to provide transportation for severely disabled students to designated special needs programs. Alberta Education provides funding for this service.

Students with Special Needs

Board Responsibility

Under the *School Act*, school boards are required to provide every resident student with an education, including access to special education programs. Students with special needs vary from the gifted and talented to those with mild or moderate learning disabilities and those with severe disabilities. Specialized learning programs provide individual students with the educational opportunities they need. Parents are involved in decisions relating to programs and services for their child.

School boards have their own policies on the programs and services they offer. These include assessment, placement, individualized program planning and health-related support services. Boards also make decisions regarding class size, staffing levels, resources and materials, and funding for special programming.

Student Placement

The policy of Alberta Education is that students with special needs should be placed in regular classrooms as the first option wherever possible. Decisions about placement are made by school boards in consultation with parents, teachers and students. Ultimately, school boards are responsible for making decisions that serve the best interests of all students.

Assessments

Assessments are a board responsibility and may be requested by the parent and/or school staff. Referring a child for assessment does not necessarily mean s/he has a long-term special education need. Assessment results are used to develop individualized program plans.

Individualized Program Plans

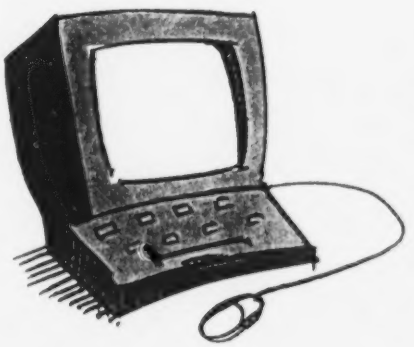
School boards must develop and implement individualized program plans for students identified as having special needs. The plan is a written, working document that outlines the programming appropriate for a child's specific needs. Parents are closely involved in the development and implementation of the plan.

VII. PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE

Technology Learning

Technology learning is part of every student's basic education in Alberta. Recognizing the critical role played by technology today, Alberta Education has

developed Information and Communication Technology learning outcomes that outline the skills and knowledge students need to acquire as they move from kindergarten through grade 12. Students will achieve these outcomes within the core subject areas of Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. Students develop their competence with technology tools, from electronic mail and Internet research to databases and spreadsheets. They also use these tools to learn subject matter in the core areas and to generally develop their communication, inquiry, decision making and problem solving skills. Specialized technology education is also available to students through Career and Technology Studies (see below).



Technology is also being used to enhance education delivery. The use of communication technology and multimedia programs developed for our curriculum supports students in distance learning and virtual programs, outreach schools and home education.

Career and Technology Studies (CTS)

Career and Technology Studies (CTS) prepares students for the job market or further studies. This unique program allows them to explore a wide range of career options in technical and trade areas, learn marketable skills and gain work experience. Developed with the direct involvement of business people and professionals, the program reflects industry standards and requirements.

Courses are offered in many career areas, and vary by school and board, according to local interest and demand. In some career areas, students may acquire credentials recognized by employers or post-secondary institutions.

Career Areas in CTS

- Agriculture
- Career Transitions
- Communications Technologies
- Community Health
- Construction Technologies
- Cosmetology
- Design Studies
- Electro-Technologies
- Energy and Mines
- Enterprise and Innovation
- Fabrication Studies
- Fashion Studies
- Financial Management
- Foods
- Forestry
- Information Processing
- Legal Studies
- Logistics
- Management and Marketing
- Mechanics
- Tourism Studies
- Wildlife

Off-campus Education

Off-campus Education includes Work Experience courses, the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), and other work place learning such as mentoring (one-on-one contacts between students and business, trade or professional people) and field trips.

Work Experience Program: Work Experience 15, 25 and 35 enable students to explore career options and develop skills in one or more areas of work. They may earn from 3 to 10 credits for each work experience course successfully completed.

Registered Apprenticeship Program: Students begin apprenticing for a trade while still in high school. They spend part of their school time in the work place as registered apprentices in one of the designated trades. They receive credits towards a high school diploma while earning credit towards their apprenticeship.

Outreach Programs

Alberta Education funds Outreach Programs to help students who have dropped out of school or are at risk of leaving. These programs usually operate in non-traditional settings such as shopping malls and use a variety of approaches to give students the individual help they need to complete grade 12. They also provide additional services including personal and career counselling, time management and study skills.

Although not every school or school board has Outreach Programs, all are committed to assisting students to successfully complete high school.

VIII. MEETING HIGH STANDARDS

High School Graduation Requirements

High school graduation requirements ensure students get the solid education they need to do well in their further studies and careers. To receive a diploma, students must complete a full range of compulsory, core subjects as well as optional courses that broaden their knowledge and skills.

Diploma requirements are set by the Minister of Education and include 100 credits in compulsory and optional courses. Schools are required to provide 25 hours of instruction for each credit. Most courses are worth either three or five credits, and the average course load is 35 credits per year.

Students must complete and pass the following courses:

English 30 or 33 or Français 30* and 33*
Social Studies 30 or 33
Mathematics 20 or 23 or 24
Science 20 or 24 or Biology 20 or Chemistry 20 or Physics 20
Physical Education 10
Career and Life Management 20

** Students in francophone programs may meet their language arts diploma requirements with grade 12 Français, but they also must complete English Language Arts to the grade 12 level.*

To broaden their high school program, students are required to complete 10 credits from Career and Technology Studies (CTS), Physical Education 20-30, Fine Arts or Second Languages. To give them more in-depth study, they must also have 10 credits in any 30-level courses (besides English 30 or 33 and Social Studies 30 or 33).

Diploma Exams

Students write diploma exams that evaluate their performance relative to provincial standards. Exams are required in the following courses:

Biology 30
Chemistry 30
English 30 and 33
Français 30
Mathematics 30 and 33
Physics 30
Science 30
Social Studies 30 and 33

Exams are written at all high schools offering diploma courses in January and June. Some also are written in April and November. Exams are written in supervised writing centres outside of schools in August.

The final mark for the examination subjects is determined by blending the school mark (50 per cent of the final mark) and the exam mark (the other 50 per cent). To pass a course, a student must obtain a final blended mark of 50 per cent or higher.

Students who do not successfully pass their course requirements may take the course and/or the exam over again. Students who do not reach the grade average required to enter a post-secondary institution may also repeat the course(s) and exam(s). Additional fees may be charged.

Alberta Education issues transcripts of marks and graduation certificates.

Parents/ Students Check Admission Requirements

A high school diploma does not guarantee admission into a post-secondary institution. Students who intend to enter a post-secondary institution should check the institution's calendar for admission requirements (courses and programs, and grade averages). They should do so as early as grade 9 and plan their senior high school courses accordingly.

Provincial Achievement Tests

Alberta has taken a leadership role in testing student achievement. In the past few years, achievement testing programs have been expanded so that tests in grades 3, 6 and 9 core courses are administered annually. The results provide parents, schools, boards and Alberta Education with valuable information about how well children are learning and whether they are meeting grade-level standards.

Parents can see how their children are doing in key program areas in relation to provincial standards. Schools can identify program areas that are working well and areas that need improvement. Boards can evaluate program delivery, and teacher support and training.

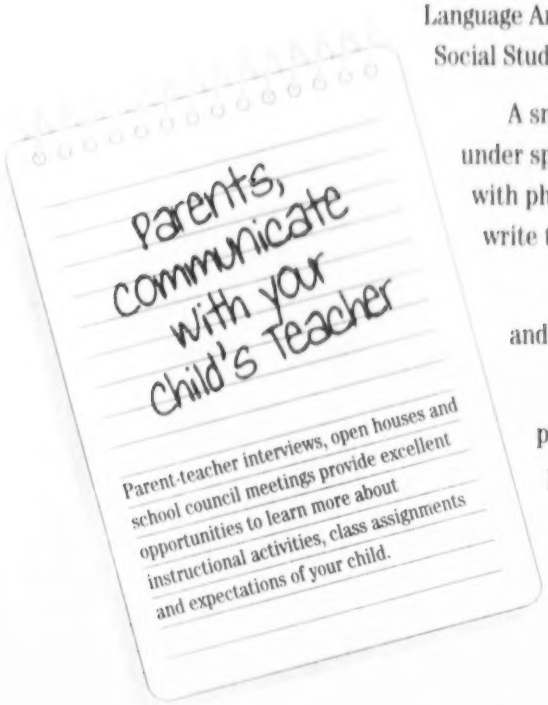
Alberta Education can improve the curriculum, textbooks and other learning resources.

Grade 3 students write tests in Math and English Language Arts. Grades 6 and 9 students write tests in English Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies. Students in French immersion and francophone programs also write French Language Arts tests. Students in francophone programs write Math, Science and Social Studies tests in French.

A small number of students may be excused by the superintendent under special circumstances. Special provisions are made for students with physical disabilities or learning disabilities who need assistance to write the tests.

Provincial achievement tests are developed by Alberta Education and classroom teachers through the co-operation of local school boards.

In addition to school and jurisdiction reports, Alberta Education prepares individual student profiles, showing each child's performance in relation to provincial standards. Two copies (one for parents) of the individual student profile are sent to the school the child will be attending in September. Schools are encouraged to share the test results with parents and involve them in discussions about improving their child's learning.


Parents, communicate with your child's teacher
Parent-teacher interviews, open houses and school council meetings provide excellent opportunities to learn more about instructional activities, class assignments and expectations of your child.

Report Cards

Teachers are required to regularly evaluate student progress, and report how well students are doing in relation to provincial grade-level standards to parents, students and school administrators. Individual teachers may use provincial achievement test results in determining final grades for their students.

Local school boards decide what format to use for report cards and how else to communicate student progress. Many schools schedule parent-teacher interviews as well as issuing written reports on each child's progress. Parents and school councils may advise schools and boards on the reporting methods they would like to see used.

National and International Achievement Testing

Alberta students also participate in national and international testing. These evaluations show how students in this province measure up to national standards, and to students across Canada and abroad. These results also provide Alberta Education with a basis for reviewing provincial standards.

International comparisons
In the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1995, Alberta students scored significantly higher than the international average in grades 4 and 8 math and science, and grade 12 advanced math and math/science literacy.
Overall, Alberta students posted some of the highest results in the world, particularly in science.

IX. QUALITY TEACHING

Standards

Alberta is the first province in Canada to adopt a teaching quality standard. In 1997, the Minister of Education established guidelines for the professional knowledge, skills and attributes expected of all teachers. These guidelines apply to the preparation of teachers, ongoing professional growth and teacher evaluation throughout the province.

School authorities, ECS operators, superintendents, principals and teachers must work together to achieve these standards. All teachers are expected to uphold the standards consistently.

Requirements

Teachers in the public school system and in accredited private schools must hold a valid Alberta teaching certificate. Local school boards hire teachers and negotiate their contracts.

For More Information

For further information and additional resources, contact Alberta Education, Communications Branch.

Telephone: (403) 427-7219 until December 31, 1998. After January 1, 1999, call (780) 427-7219. Call toll free within Alberta, but outside of Edmonton, by dialing 310-0000 and then 427-7219.

E-mail: comm.contact@edc.gov.ab.ca

Address: Alberta Education
Communications
11160 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 0L2
Canada

For more information about specific schools and programs, contact your local school board.

Look for Us on the World Wide Web

You can connect with Alberta Education's home page at
< http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca >.
This document can also be found on the home page, under Education System.

Your Comments Are Valuable

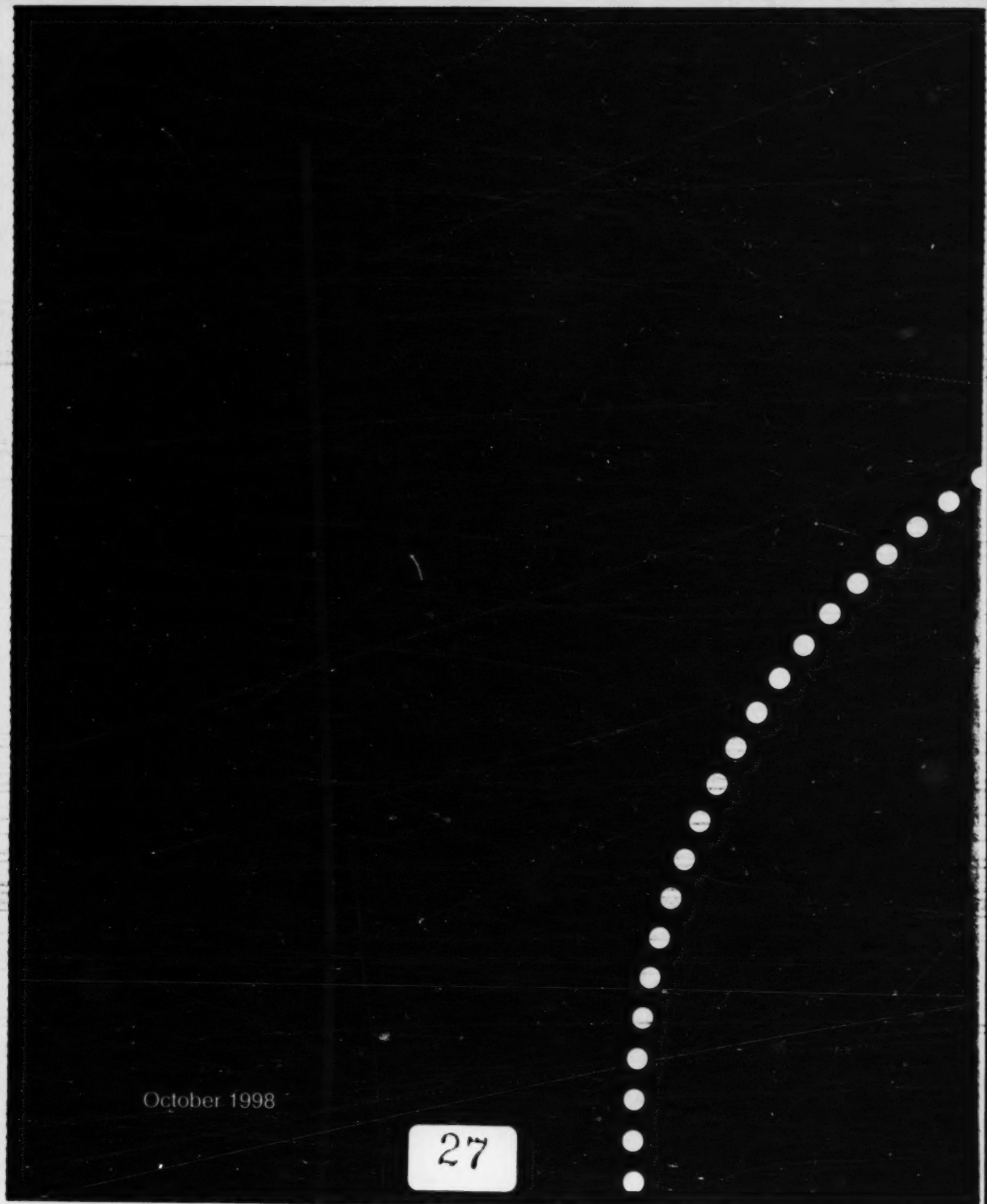
We appreciate your feedback on this publication: whether you found it helpful and what other areas of information you would like to see included.

Please fill in and mail the evaluation card in this booklet, call us at the phone number given above or e-mail us at the above address. Thank you.

ALBERTA EDUCATION CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA
Alberta. Alberta Education.
Our students, our future: an introduction to education in Alberta, kindergarten to grade 12.

ISBN 0-7785-0297-x
1. Education - Alberta.
2. Education - Aims and objectives - Alberta. I. Title.
LA418.A3.A333 1998 379.154

24



October 1998